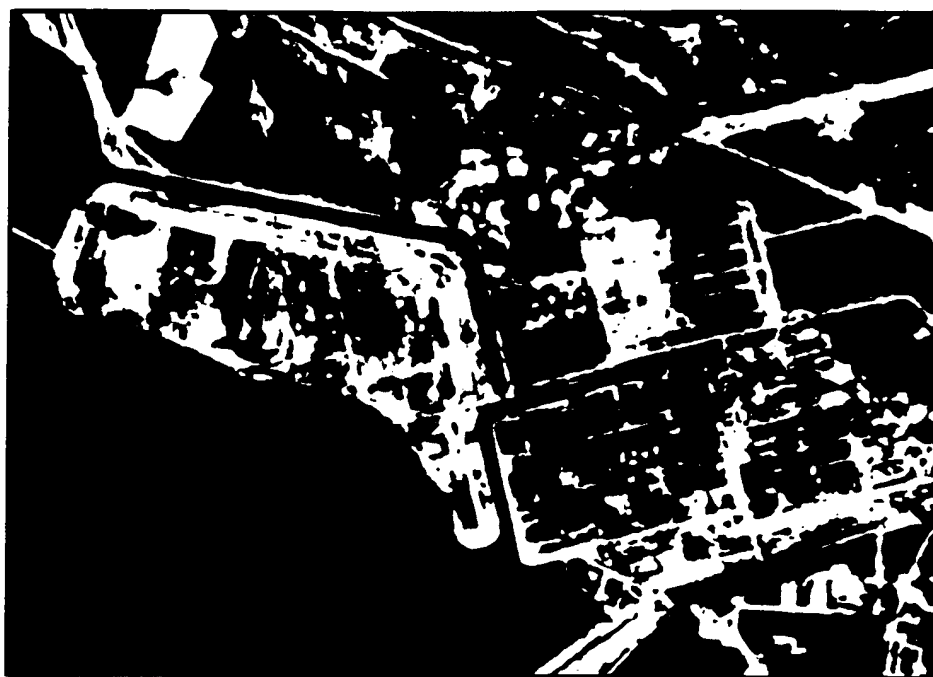


The Puzzling Problems Of Pictures From Space



SPOT satellite image of Chernobyl after the nuclear accident

By Tony Mauro

Secretary Weinberger refused to say whether the Sixth Fleet is steaming toward the trouble zone, but the ABC News Space Camera Unit reports that, indeed, the largest vessels of the fleet have changed course and headed south in the last 72 hours...

The day when such a broadcast will be possible is not far off—it could be as soon as this spring.

Thanks to the little-noticed launch of the French satellite SPOT 1 on February 21, American news media have at their fingertips a newsgathering tool of mindboggling—and troubling—potential.

Satellite remote sensing—taking images of Earth from space—will enable any news organization willing to pay to order pictures (actually digital images) that, de-

pending on location and cloud cover, could show objects as small as 10 meters (33 feet or so) in usable form. On clear days and high-contrast land surface such as deserts, resolution may be even better.

The satellite was pressed into service May 1, when all three major networks clamored for—and got—images of the damaged Soviet nuclear plant at Chernobyl. Volcanoes, earthquake damage and forest fires all could be illustrated in a dramatic new way. If Iraq says it attacked a port in Iran, but Iran denies it, satellite imagery could resolve the dispute. What does the closed Soviet city of Gorki look like, or Kharg Island or the hijacked Achille Lauro cruise ship? Did an Afghan village really burn down? Satellite imagery could provide the answers.

The possibilities of satellite photography are endless, and the nation's news media are just beginning to daydream

about them. "A whole new world of newsgathering is ahead," says ABC News assignment editor Mark Brender, who spent much of last year trying to interest news organizations in the new technology. Spot Image Corporation reportedly is talking to all three commercial networks about use of the French satellite's images—which could cost as little as \$400 per print.

But Brender, who heads a space committee of the Radio-Television News Directors Association, also wonders what might happen if remote sensing technology is used to gather information about U.S. or foreign military installations, troop movements or even wars.

The next time a Grenada erupts, it may matter less that reporters and cameramen are not invited along; the spacecam will have it covered.

The new technology may enable the

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